

Facilities Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, May 14, 2008, 5:30 pm
Madison County Courthouse, Virginia City, MT

Those in Attendance (taken from sign-up sheet): Chairman John Scully, Commissioner Dave Schulz, Frank Nelson, MaryLou Freese, George Means, Mick Welton, Bill Hanley, Toni James, Pat Bradley, Paul Marsh, Jay Willett, Kathleen Mumme, Bill Doggett, Vergel Lindsey, Dona Lindsey, Dale Regain, Faye Knuland, Roger Williams, Angela Mueller

Chairman Scully called the meeting to order at 5:30.

Chairman Scully gave a brief overview of the preceding meetings to the people in attendance, covering needs assessment, past studies, safety and emergency issues, the Pankey house issue (a gas leak was discovered by a staff and raised potentially high health issues), dispatch problems, and male/female ratio requirements. He also addressed the concern that Big Sky has not been considered in the process due to their proximity to Virginia City and Bozeman. He pointed out that all of the facilities recommended to the commission have been looked at with the exception of the Jarvis house, which will be toured in the near future. Chairman Scully introduced Sheriff Dave Schenk and Detention Officer Carmin Hill, who gave the Sheriff's report.

Sheriff's Report

Sheriff Schenk introduced Detention Officer Hill as a new state facilities inspector due to her high interest and excellence in her training. Officer Hill took training seminars offered by the National Institute of Corrections, covering Jail Standards, Jail Resources, Liability, and other subjects. Since Officer Hill is a new inspector, Madison County has easy access to information surrounding Montana State jail requirements and standards.

Officer Hill handed out an information packet that outlines the current and past jail housing situation in Madison County. It details the number, type, and sex of prisoners, and how many are housed within Madison County's jail and how many are housed elsewhere (eg: Townsend, Dillon, etc). She explained that according to current standards, prisoners are required to be separated by sex, crime, and level of threat to other prisoners, themselves, and/or any mental conditions. Each of these categories is separated into "pods." The most recent data that was available at the time of the meeting was from May 12, and if Madison County were in compliance with the minimum of four pods, all four would have been occupied. Since facilities were not available, some prisoners were taken to a separate facility.

Sheriff Schenk noted that juveniles are not housed in Virginia City. They go to two different facilities, one in Anaconda (which charges approx \$200/day), and one in Billings (which charges approx \$190/day). Madison County has no intention to house juveniles due to the strict standards and separate housing requirements apart from adults. The sheriff's office does have the ability to arrest juveniles and process those individuals, and can keep them in the booking room until a parent or legal guardian comes to get them, but the sheriff's department may not hold the juvenile for a length of time that would require jailing. If this happens, they need to be transported to an adequate facility.

Question: Are mental health professionals available to the prisoners?

Officer Hill explained that yes, mental health professionals travel from Butte or Bozeman, but if someone needs constant mental health monitoring, he or she would be moved to a hospital. Madison County has no intention to ever attach a hospital to the jail, so this practice will stay consistent. As long as medical help is within a reasonable distance, no additional facility is required. Two doctors have expressed the willingness to act as on-call doctors whenever the need presented itself.

Chairman Scully asked how many beds/pods would be the minimum required. Sheriff Schenk explained that 22 beds would be the minimum, spread through four pods. He clarified that even though all 22 beds would likely never be full, there would probably be some prisoners in each pod. Currently, the jail has two cells – one with six beds and one with two beds. Since there are only two classification areas, the jail could have two prisoners and could be classified as full (eg: a female and a sexual offender – neither one of these classifications can be mixed with a different classification). Any additional prisoners would need to be taken to a different facility. The last ballot issue proposed 21 beds and four pods. The figure was derived from a combination of current need and projection growth. The study was done by an architect who collaborated with NIC (National Institute of

Corrections), which specializes in all aspects of jails. Commissioner Schulz clarified that the architects did their own research, collaborated with NIC, calculated future growth projections, and used the sheriff's input.

Question: What was the last legal case held against the county?

Commissioner Schulz explained that the last case was within the last year, for a self-inflicted injury due to inadequate supervision plus all of the other infractions that have been on the table in the past.

The square footage requirement for multiple occupancy cells is 50 square feet/prisoner.

Question: Given the preferred decision to have direct vision jail with pods, does the last jail proposal put us in good legal status and meet our needs?

Sheriff Schenk answered that it would. The current jail numbers are not necessarily accurate portrayals of what it they would be if the jail were already up to standards. 21 beds are the minimum the Madison County jail would need.

General discussion followed about current capacity versus future capacity. There was a suggestion that the JP would possibly be incarcerating more people if the jail were up to current standards, so the current numbers may not be accurate.

Discussion surrounded the notion that if the proposed facility was the minimum needed, the board needed to sell it to the public better. The public needs to know what types of prisoners we are housing, and explaining the difference between a prison and a jail. The public needs to know that a felon can spend up to two weeks in the county jail while waiting for bed space in the department of corrections, and during that time, it is possible that only one other prisoner can be jailed in the same facility.

Question: Is there an issue with dispatch safety?

Sheriff Schenk explained that yes, there is a safety issue with dispatch being so close to the booking room. It is not in a good spot for emergency, safety, and communication issues. Dispatch is typically separate from the jail in an Emergency Operations Center.

It was suggested that the board communicate more effectively with the community with a mailer.

Survey

Chairman Scully expressed that since the author of the survey, Nancy Griffin, was not at the meeting, the survey should be discussed at a future meeting. He passed out a copy of the survey and asked members of the board to look at it and bring questions/suggestions to the next meeting.

Consistent Committee Members

Chairman Scully has identified a group of people in communities who have agreed to act as a public face for the board as a whole. He explained that the identification was not done to exclude any members of the board, but to give the group a more consistent face to the public. They will be the ones responsible for disbursing information to their respective communities.

Commissioner Schulz pointed out that conceptually, the board is back to point A. He explained that Chairman Schulz identified 6 people from each of the three commission districts for eighteen people total. The hope is that these eighteen people will come to a conclusion and will take in out into the community, educating their peers about the needs and requirements of a new facility.

Additional Business

Chairman Scully suggested that the information packets from Bill Hanley, Kim Hudson, and the survey be discussed at the next meeting. He asked all the participants to look over the information and bring all questions and comments to the next meeting.

The next meeting was set for Wednesday, June 4 at 5:30 pm at the Virginia City Courthouse Courtroom.